

Message Text

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47

ACTION ARA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA

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SUBJ: STRIKES AND DISORDERS TROUBLE COLOMBIA

1. SUMMARY: ALTHOUGH NOT UNUSUAL AT THIS SEASON, STRIKES AND DISORDERS DISTURBED COLOMBIA'S SCENE. STRIKES HAVE CAUSED OR THREATEN TO CAUSE DISRUPTION IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE, BANKING, THE PORTS, THE MINISTRY OF PUBLIC WORKS, AMONG TEACHERS, AND THE PETROLEUM INDUSTRY. STUDENT UNREST CONTINUES UNABATED IN MEDELLIN. THE FATE OF THE KIDNAPPED LABOR LEADER, JOSE RAQUEL MERCADO, REMAINS UNCERTAIN. IN RESPONSE, PRESIDENT LOPEZ HAS CONTINUED THE STATE OF SEIGE AND HAS CALLED A MEETING OF HIS CABINET TO EXAMINE THE SITUATION. END SUMMARY.

2. PUBLIC ORDER CONTINUES TO BE OF CONSIDERABLE CONCERN FOR THE GOC. HEADING THE LIST OF TROUBLED AREAS IS LABOR STRIFE. A 10-DAY OLD STRIKE AT THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (BOGOTA 2080) HAS HALTED TAX COLLECTIONS AND COULD FORCE THE GOVERNMENT TO SEEK LOANS TO PAY ITS BILLS. SINCE THE MINISTRY WORKERS ARE PUBLIC EMPLOYEES THE STRIKE HAS BEEN DECLARED ILLEGAL. MASS FIRINGS HAVE BEGUN AND NEW HIRINGS ARE UNDERWAY. MEANWHILE THE MILITARY HAS OCCUPIED SOME MINISTRY FACILITIES. THE STRIKE IS MAINLY A PROTEST AGAINST A REORGANIZATION AND MODERIZATION PLAN WHICH EMPLOYEES CLAIM WILL ELIMINATE JOBS.

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3. LONG AWAITED BANK STRIKES (75 BOGOTA 11105) WERE FINALLY

KICKED OFF. WORK STOPPAGES SO FAR APPEAR EFFECTIVE IN THREE BANKS BUT STRIKES AT THE COFFEE GROWERS BANK AND THE CATTLE-MEN'S BANK IN BOGOTA, FAILED.

4. OVER TEN THOUAND PORT WORKERS INITIATED A TWELVE-HOUR STRIKE THIS MORNING AT ALL COLOMBIAN PORTS (BOGOTA 2037). THE STOPPAGE WAS CALLED TO PROTEST THE KIDNAPPINGS OF LABOR LEADER JOSE MERCADO AND TO PRESS DEMANDS FOR VIGOROUS GOVERNMENT ACTION IN THE CASE.

5. EMPLOYEES OF THE MINISTRY OF PUBLIC WORKS INITIATED A STAGGERED STRIKE YESTERDAY. THE FIRST STAGE WAS A WALK OUT BY 500 ROAD WORKERS IN THE DEPARTMENT OF TOLIMA. SALARY READJUSTMENTS ARE THE ISSUE THERE.

6. THE COMMUNIST-CONTROLLED TEACHERS FEDERATION ALERTED ITS MEMBERS FOR A STRIKE AT ANY MOMENT. TEACHERS ARE UNHAPPY OVER EDUCATION REFORM MEASURES AND SALARY LEVELS.

7. THE MILITARY OCCUPIED THE HUGE OIL REFINERY COMPLEX AT BARRANCABERMEJA IN ANTICIPATION OF A STRIKE BY THE EIGHT THOUSAND WORKERS THERE. AGAIN, WAGES ARE THE MOTIVATION FOR THE UNREST.

8. MEANWHILE, THE KIDNAPPING OF JOSE MERCADO, PRESIDENT OF THE CONFEDERATION OF COLOMBIAN WORKERS, BY THE LEFTIST TERRORIST GROUP M-19, REMAINS UNSOLVED (BOGOTA 2037). M-19 HAS GIVEN ASSURANCES BY LETTER THAT MERCADO IS STILL ALIVE BUT WILL BE SUBJECT TO A "PEOPLES TRIAL" FOR HIS "CRIMES" AGAINST COLOMBIAN WORKERS. THE OUTCOME OF THE "TRIAL" WILL DETERMINE WHETHER MERCADO IS TO BE KILLED OR SET FREE. LEADERS OF THE TWO DEMOCRATIC LABOR ORGANIZATIONS, CTC AND UTC, HAVE RESPONDED TO THE KIDNAPPINGS BY WARNING AGAINST BOTH LEFT AND RIGHT EXTREMISM AND BY ACCUSING COLOMBIA'S GOVERNING CLASS OF INSUFFICIENT INTEREST IN MERCADO'S FATE.

9. IN MEDELLIN SERIOUS STUDENT UNREST IS ENTERING ITS SECOND MONTH. THE BOX SCORE SO FAR IS THREE UNIVERSITIES AND MANY HIGH SCHOOLS CLOSED, 68 POLICEMEN INJURED, AND WELL OVER 100 STUDENTS DETAINED. NO END IS IN SIGHT. POLICE FRUSTRATION RECENTLY SURFACED IN THE FORM OF POLICE DEMANDS FOR MORE MONEY, MEN , AND LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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EQUIPMENT. THE LOCAL POLICE CHIEF SAID THAT OTHERWISE SECURITY COULD NOT BE GUARANTEED.

10. RESPONDING TO THE SPATE OF TROUBLES, PRESIDENT LOPEZ ANNOUNCED THAT THE STATE OF SIEGE WILL REMAIN IN EFFECT FOR THE TIME BEING (BOGOTA 2038) AND HE HAS CALLED A MEETING OF HIS MINISTERS FOR THS WEEKEND TO STUDY THE SITUATION. FORMER PRESIDENT CARLOS LLERAS TERMED SECURITY CONDITIONS "GRAVE"

AND WARNED THE PUBLIC "NOT TO PLAY INTO THE HANDS OF LEFTIST
EXTREMISTS".

11. ALTHOUGH DISTRUBING, THE CURRENT UNREST IS NOT AN UNFAMILIAR
PHENOMENON. LAST YEAR AT THIS TIME STRIKES WERE RAMPANT AND THE
MINISTER OF LABOR ACCUSED THE COMMUNISTS OF TRYING TO TOPPLE
THE GOVERNMENT (75 BOGOTA 370). IN MAY 1975 PUBLIC DISTURBANCES
WERE SERIOUS ENOUGH TO CLAUSE THE IMPOSITION OF THE STATE OF
SIEGE. NEVERTHELESS, THE GOC IS CONCERNED AND ITS RESPONSE IS
EXPECTED TO CONTINUE FIRM.
VAKY

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